The GOP 'Lie Detector'

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By Morton Mintz
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The Ford campaign used a controversial machine called a "voice stress analyzer" to try to audit Jimmy Carter's truthfulness in the first two presidential debates, a Republican National Committee official said yesterday.

In the process, the machine's manufacturer told a reporter, he found that President Ford's voice registered "heavy stress" each time he mentioned the word "Congress."

For undisclosed reasons, the President Ford Committee chose not to publicize the result of either the Carter or the Ford analysis. "Obviously, whatever they found in those recordings was not used," said Peter B. Teeley, a Ford committee spokesman.

Eddie Mahe Jr., executive director of the Republican National Committee, said that he and Stuart Spencer, Ford's deputy campaign director, were reluctant to publicize the Carter result because "this was the kind of thing that can whip around on you and blow up on you 14 ways from Sunday."

The maker of the device, Rick Bennett of the Seattle suburb of Issaquah, said he had hoped to have the Carter result publicized before the election, claiming it would have changed the outcome.

But he refused to detail the finding yesterday, saying that in the post-election period, 51 per cent of the voters —those who voted for Carter—have "a vested interest" in him, and that disclosure might lead to ruination of his (Bennett's) fledgling manufacturing enterprise.

Asked why Ford showed heavy stress whenever he mentioned the word "Congress" during the Sept. 23 and Oct. 6 debates, Bennett said he believed the President's tension reflected the difficulty of dealing with a House and a Senate dominated by Democrats. For that reason, he said, he urged publicizing the finding.

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Spencer feard, howvr, that voters would view Ford's stress as meaning that if elected he could not work with a Congress certain to remain Democratic and for that reason preferred silence, Bennett said in a telephone interview.

If the Ford campaign had claimed that the machine impugned Carter's truthfulness or verified Ford's, questions about the voice anatysis technique might have been raised.

Voice analyzers are supposed to measure giveaway modulations in the human voice when a lie is told. By 1974, more than 500 of the machines were being used by police agencies and private organizations here and abroad. The principal producer was Dektor Counterintelligence & Security Inc. of Springfield, Va.

The Army, which owned three of the devices, had a study made by a Fordham University psychologist. In a report in February, 1974, the Army said the study indicated a "clear inferiority of voice analysis...not only to the polygraph but also to judgments made on the basis of simply observing subjects' behavior.

Last year, New York writer George O'Toole, who used electronic equipment to make analyses for the Central Intelligence Agency for three years, claimed that his tests with a voice stress analyzer showed that Lee Harvey Oswald had told the truth when he claimed he had not killed President Kennedy.

Bennett said the devices are "very reliable." One "proof," he said, was in his six months in business he has sold more than 50 of them with an unconditional guarantee of a refund of the $1,500 purchase price and no one has asked for a refund.

The Washington connection began last month when Roger McLoughlin of Denver, a vice president of Bennett's firm, told a former Ford aide that Bennett had monitored Carter's voice and had gotten "damning information."

As the Republican committee's Mahe tells it, McLoughlin contacted him to offer to do an analysis, free of charge, of stress registered in tape recordings of Carter's voice in the first two debates. "McLoughlin was particularly aggressive, wanting to get exposure and to get to the press," Mahe said.

He recalled being skeptical, saying it wouldn't surprise him if stress showed in men whose "goals, ambitions, dreams" rode on their performance in the debates. But it "sure as hell wasn't my business to make the decision," he said, so he put the matter before Spencer.

The upshot was that on Oct. 20, McLoughlin and Bennett demonstrated the machine in Spencer's office, and then, at the RNC, spent about 12 hours reviewing debate tapes. They underlined sections of the transcript where the needle on the machine swung, purportedly showing Carter to be under stress.

The next day—the eve of the final debate Oct. 22 — Mahe sent the underlined transcript to Spencer. The response of the Ford campaign official was silence. The needle didn't move.